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SUBJECT: ITALY REAFFIRMS CUBA TWO-TRACK APPROACH TO DAS
MADISON, INQUIRES ABOUT POSADA CARRILES

REF: STATE 52623

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Classified By: Political Military Counselor Jonathan R. Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In May 7 meetings with Italian officials, DAS Madison highlighted concerns about rising repression in Cuba and GOC efforts to create divisions in the international community, and hailed the Unity for Freedom statement. She called for the international community to focus on the release of political prisoners. The Italians said that Italy believed in dialogue with the GOC and engaging the opposition. FM D'Alema had spoken clearly and at length on human rights with visiting FM Perez Roque. Italy thought suspended sanctions served no purpose, and that the two-track approach had allowed for better understanding of internal GOC dynamics. Italian opposition to language on Cuba in the U.S.-EU declaration stemmed from concerns that including Cuba and Venezuela in a list of war situations or serious terrorism was inappropriate. Italy viewed Moratinos' Havana visit as a problem and recognized the domestic politics in Spain's policy. Italy was interested in U.S. efforts to have Posada Carriles extradited. The Chamber's Human Rights Committee was focused on Cuba, and believed dialogue was important, as was pressure on the Vatican. End summary.

¶2. (U) May 7 WHA DAS Kirsten Madison met with Italian MFA Under Secretary for Latin America Donato Di Santo and Director General for the Americas Claudio Bisogniero and, separately, with Deputy Pietro Marcenaro, Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Human Rights Committee.

¶3. (C) Raising U.S. concerns about aggressive GOC outreach to create divisions within the EU and between the U.S. and EU, Madison urged Italy not to let the Cuban regime block efforts to facilitate a peaceful transition. While we assessed that repression was rising, the opposition Unity for Freedom statement was an important positive development. Madison highlighted the declaration in the opposition's statement that Cuban's human rights were not subject to negotiations between the GOC and another government, which she saw as a response to Spanish FM Moratinos' visit to Havana (reftel) and an expression of the desire of Cuba's opposition to open a dialogue with their government on these issues. Madison argued that the release of political prisoners and the end of the practice of holding political prisoners should be the focus of the international community. As long as the state continued to repress political discourse, real dialogue among Cubans, which was essential for transition, was not possible.

¶4. (C) Di Santo responded that dialogue with the GOC was impossible without also engaging the opposition. He would not make judgments on Moratinos' visit, but noted that Italian FM Massimo D'Alema's Rome meeting with Cuban FM Felipe Perez Roque focused quantitatively and qualitatively on human rights. Di Santo emphasized that D'Alema clearly and explicitly affirmed the GOI's position on the need for respect for human rights and the release of political prisoners, and called for a reversal of the GOC's current stance. According to Di Santo, D'Alema practically quoted Assistant Secretary Shannon in the meeting, calling for conditions in Cuba that would allow the Cuban people to decide their own future.

¶5. (C) The GOI was aware of the Cuban regime's efforts to create divisions, and took those efforts into account, Di Santo said. He thought EU suspended sanctions served no purpose with respect to the GOC. The two-track EU common policy had allowed for a better understanding of elements of the Cuban regime. Di Santo argued that the international community had a responsibility to not foster cohesion of Cuban leaders around a common interest, but to seek out differences within the Communist Party. Italy's policy was to work toward this end, while keeping an emphasis on respect for human rights: firm on principles, but elastic on political terms. Di Santo noted that it would be helpful if Cuba became less of a domestic issue for some countries.

¶6. (C) Italy wanted to have a dialogue with the GOC on human rights and the transition, according to Di Santo. However, if the GOC decided to apply the death penalty to the would-be airplane hijackers, Italy would take the decision very seriously and would act accordingly. Italy wanted to avoid "bureaucratically" motivated mention of Cuba in documents like the EU-U.S. declaration and the EU Cuba paper. Any mention of the situation should take new developments into account.

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¶7. (C) Madison responded that the Cuban-American community, while active, did not drive U.S. policy. She noted that the USG had made clear in its public statements that enduring change in Cuba can only be accomplished by Cubans on the island and that the U.S. would not support people's homes being arbitrarily taken away from them. The U.S. goal was to bring Cuba back into the mainstream of the Inter-American system, Madison said. A democratic, free, and sovereign Cuba returned to the Inter-American fold would have a positive affect on the entire region. Madison registered U.S. puzzlement over Italy's opposition to including human rights language on Cuba in the U.S.-EU statement, emphasizing that we did not want the issue to drop off the agenda. EU sanctions, though suspended, send an important message and their removal would send the wrong signal to those in the regime who might support change, would undercut the democratic opposition at a time when they were being more active, and would be perceived as acceptance of a de facto succession, Madison argued. Di Santo indicated that he had taken note of our views.

8 (C) On the Moratinos visit, the U.S. had been careful in any public comments and did not want to contribute to divisions within the EU, but felt the visit left the opposition more vulnerable. Madison noted that the U.S. has raised with Madrid directly our view that maintaining outreach to the opposition was essential. Given Havana's track record, the U.S. was skeptical of the human rights mechanism--Perez Roque had already declared it would not address internal issues. Madison noted she was surprised during her visit to Spain by the extent to which Cuba was a domestic political issue and the impact that had on Spain's policy.

¶9. (C) The disagreement on the EU-U.S. declaration language was not related to human rights issues, Di Santo responded.

Italy supported human rights language whenever necessary, but believed human rights needed to be discussed in universal terms. In the case of the declaration, Italy was concerned about the appropriateness of explicitly citing the cases of Cuba and Venezuela in a document where only war situations or serious terrorism were discussed. Di Santo said including the language would have been a mistake, and would have backfired rather than stimulating a solution.

¶10. (C) Di Santo acknowledged that the Moratinos visit was a problem; Cuba was a domestic politics issue for Spain. On EU political sanctions, Di Santo indicated that he had taken note of the concerns raised by Madison. He hoped U.S. officials would reflect on the lack of results from the embargo, and on how to take advantage of the current situation considering the possible practical impact. Di Santo noted that the island was not divided into two blocks--there were many viewpoints, and even within the PCC there were differences. It was up to the international community to encourage a situation that would bring these differences out.

¶11. (C) Madison agreed that Cuban society contained many players whose viewpoints we needed to look at, including the military, church, and others. The U.S. was not focused on a GOC/opposition duality, but believed that the opposition was reflective of a broader desire for change in Cuba, a desire the opposition was articulating on behalf of many Cubans. She emphasized that we are always looking strategically at U.S. policy and policy tools, and that changes in our policy would be driven by changes on the island.

Posada Carriles

¶12. (C) Di Santo asked for an update on the Luis Posada Carriles case, noting that COM Michael Parmly had briefed on the issue in a meeting with EU Ambassadors in Havana. Madison explained that the U.S. had contacted a number of governments who might have evidence to prosecute Posada Carriles on terrorism charges. The only charges we had been able to file were on immigration violations, and Posada Carriles was under house arrest pending trial. Madison noted the issue was further complicated by a U.S. immigration judge's finding that Posada Carriles would most likely be tortured if sent to Venezuela. Madison noted past Italian responses that they would not be interested in prosecuting Posada Carriles, but stated that the U.S. would be interested in learning if that view had changed. Di Santo said that

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Italy, like the U.S., had an independent judiciary, but that he would take a look at the issue. Note: Post will report subsequent developments septel. End note.

Parliament: Human Rights Committee Focused on Cuba

¶13. (C) In a separate meeting with Marcenaro, Madison explained the U.S. view that the human rights situation in Cuba was worsening, and concerns regarding the closing of Vitral, while highlighting the Unity for Freedom document as a positive development. Marcenaro explained that he had traveled to Cuba three times, once for an "illegal" conference organized by the opposition, and personally knew several prominent dissidents, including Vladimiro Roca. Under his chairmanship, the Human Rights Committee was taking up the issue of Cuba, looking at ways to support dialogue.

¶14. (C) Marcenaro said his committee believed communication was important to create an opening, but acknowledged that dialogue with the GOC was difficult. In exchanges with Cuban government leaders, Marcenaro said he had emphasized the need for greater openness, arguing that any future regime that

failed to generate it would be dead on arrival. He also noted the importance of the Catholic church. Its decision on how to respond to the current situation was unclear, but Marcenaro thought the Vatican could be pressed to be more active on human rights.

¶15. (C) Madison explained that while the U.S. had been working hard on human rights issues broadly, we were conscious of the need to do more to emphasize economic and labor rights and the GOC's use of economic repression. Marcenaro agreed that freedom for workers to organize was important and that the international community needed to speak out. Note: May 15 Marcenaro participated in a day-long international conference on Labor Rights and the Social Responsibility of Companies in Cuba, organized by the International Group for Social Corporate Responsibility in Cuba and Italy's Radical Party. End note. Marcenaro assured Madison his Human Rights Committee was fully engaged in the struggle for democracy in Cuba.

¶16. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS Madison.
Spogli